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SCIENTIFIC EDUCATION AND THE TEACHING OF PHYSICS[1]

THE real cause of the prevailing neglect of science, with all its pernicious results, is that almost all our political leaders have received the most favored and fashionable form of public school education, and are without any scientific education. An education in classics and dialectics, the education of a lawyer, may be a good thing—for lawyers; though even that is doubtful. For the training of men who are to govern a state whose very existence depends on applications of science, and on the proper utilization of available stores of energy, it is ludicrously unsuitable. We hear of the judicial frame of mind which lawyers bring to the discussion of matters of high policy, but in the majority of scientific cases it is the open mind of crass ignorance. The result is lamentable: I myself heard a very eminent counsel declare in a case of some importance, involving practical applications of science, that one of Newton's laws of motion was that "friction is the cause of oscillations"! And the helpfulness of some eminent counsel and judges in patent cases is a byword.

As things are, eminence in science is no qualification, it would even seem to be a positive disqualification, for any share in the conduct of the affairs of this great industrial country. The scientific sides of public questions are ignored, nay, in many cases our rulers are unconscious of their existence. Recently in a discussion on the Forestry Bill in the House of Lords a member of that illustrious body made the foolish assertion that forestry had nothing to do with science; all that was needed was to dig holes and stick young trees into them. Could fatuity go further?

[1] Concluding part of the address of the president to the Mathematical and Physical Science Section at the Bournemouth meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.